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FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1623

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TBILISI 000972

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/28/2019

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL GG

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: PROTESTS SMALL - QUIET

REF: TBILISI 968

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (SBU) Summary and Comment: On May 27, a day after large scale demonstrations, only a small group of protesters numbering roughly 1000-1500 gathered in front of Parliament. The crowd listened to largely subdued speeches by non-parliamentary leaders who have decided to continue protests in spite of the Patriarch's recent announcement that he did not support Saakashvili's resignation. The smaller group led by Nino Burjanadze (Democratic Movement - United Georgia), Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way), and Eka Beselia (United Georgia) addressed the crowd announcing that they would lead a march to the Mayor's office on May 28 to protest what they claim was his influence on the Patriarch to make remarks which they viewed as pro-Saakashvili and the antithesis of what the Patriarch actually believed. Notably absent were Irakli Alasania (Alliance) and the National Forum who earlier in the day announced that they would no longer pursue the strategy of constant protests. By mid-day May 28, only about 500 protesters were participating in the march on the mayor's office. The opposition appears to be working out its next moves. End Summary.

Small Crowd Gathers - Defectors Asked to Reconsider

¶2. (SBU) The speeches given by Burjanadze, Beselia, Zourabichvili, and Koba Davitashvili called on the crowd to struggle together jointly. Beselia said that "now was not the time for engaging in the struggle versus the authorities separately." Davitashvili said that the defectors from the group should reconsider but would be replaced by others if they did not come around. Burjanadze indirectly slammed the defectors who would pursue dialogue saying that "not a single government can be changed through beautiful statements and especially when it comes to Saakashvili, whose regime cannot be changed through statements and delicate methods." The remaining group of leaders indicated that protests would continue, and roads, highways, and railways would be blocked, but gave no specifics. David Gamkrelidze (Alliance - New Rights) said he also supported blocking roads and railways and continued protests which put him at odds with nominal Alliance leader Alasania.

Patriarch's Words Still Sting

¶3. (C) Burjanadze, Beselia, Levan Gachechiladze, and Giorgi Gachechiladze (Singer Utsnobi) met the Patriarch on May 27 to attempt to convince him to change or modify his statement. No comment was given by anybody at the meeting and the Patriarchate has issued no further comments. Subsequently, Burjanadze, Zourabichvili, and others made comments dismissing the Patriarch's statement saying that he should not be burdened with politics, or that the non-parliamentary opposition would not take orders from anybody including the Patriarch. The current conspiracy circulating around Tbilisi among non-parliamentary faithful is that Tbilisi Mayor, Gigi Ugalava showed up at the mass to threaten the Patriarch to support Saakashvili. A number of protesters in the May 27 crowd repeated the rumor to Poloff and seemed to take this

version of events as true as a matter of faith.

Thursday's Plans in the Air

¶4. (C) Although certain groups are forming among the formerly united non-parliamentary opposition (to be reported septel), confusion and uncertainty still reign. A number of leaders including Alasania and the National Forum have not completely broken with the non-parliamentary opposition, but have publicly stated they would no longer participate in the rallies. The split makes decision making easier for the Orallies. The split makes decision making easier for the hard-liners, but their ability to draw significant crowds remains in doubt and limits their ability to stage massive roadblocks and pickets. The remaining group led by Burjanadze, Beselia, and Zourabichvili indicated that it would march from Sport Palace to the Tbilisi Mayor's ffice at 12pm on Thursday, but rainy cold weather thus far has limited turnout to about 500 protesters.

TEFFT